

Five Tips to Avoid Caregiver Burnout



Caring for an ill, injured or disabled Veteran can be rewarding and exhausting. For Family Caregivers who juggle many priorities, it can take a lot out of you. Sometimes you may be left feeling run down or sick. Here are five tips for avoiding burnout.

Learn about the condition or illness affecting the Veteran you care for. Learn as much as possible about the condition and how it could change over time. Be prepared to expect and face the worst together.

- Having an idea of what to expect can lower your stress level.
- It will help you plan for future medical needs. It might also give you time to learn skills you will need later.
- Some health problems may cause your loved one to act out, say harmful things, or not even remember who they are. Staying educated about the illness can help you understand when this is a symptom and not act negatively toward it. Remember, sometimes your loved one isn't sure how to deal with it either.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Think positively about the hard work you do, but remember that it's OK to ask for help.

- Make a list of tasks you would like help with and people you can call for help.
- Ask a neighbor to pick up some items for you from the store.
- Ask family members to help with household chores, paperwork or research. You might be surprised at how willing they are to help.
- Contact your local area agencies or volunteer groups for assistance. Many groups offer meal delivery, transportation and respite care.



Take breaks. Find some time each day when you can safely step away from the Veteran you care for – for example, when he or she has a friend or another family member visiting. During your break:

- Go outside for a walk.
- Go for a bike ride.
- Read a book.
- Listen to music.
- Chat with a friend.
- Schedule respite or adult day health care weekly or monthly to give yourself breaks.

Even if you only have a few minutes free – give yourself a much-needed break. Check out our resource on **[Making the Most of Your Limited Time](#)** for ideas.

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Take care of your health, too! To give the best care to the Veteran you care for, you need to stay in good health. Your health is essential to your ability to keep providing for the Veteran you care for.

- Get regular health and dental checkups, and any health screenings you may need annually.
- Make sure you get your annual flu shots.
- Try to maintain regular sleeping patterns as much as possible.
- Eat healthy meals and snacks.
- Daily physical activity can help lower stress, increase your energy, and help keep your heart healthy.
- Your mental health is important, too. Connect with other Caregivers who may be going through the same thing. Or reach out to professionals for support. VA's Caregiver Support Line (1-855-260-3274) can be a great place to start.

Stay Positive! Be realistic about what you can and can't do. It will help you keep a positive attitude.

- There are many things you can't control, but you can control your actions. Learn to recognize the things you can't control, and don't lose time worrying about how you can't change them.
- A positive attitude may help you give the Veteran you care for the best care possible.
- You may not be able to make the Veteran you care for better, but you can protect his or her dignity and do your best to help them feel safe and loved.
- Even if the Veteran you care for is not able to show happiness or appreciation, you can feel good about the care you are giving and the love he or she is receiving.

Being a Family Caregiver is tough – there is no doubt about it. You're there to support your Veteran, and we're here to support you. If you need additional assistance, call VA's Caregiver Support Line (1-855-260-3274) or visit us online at www.caregiver.va.gov.